

WETA Public Media in Washington, D.C. and a Coalition of Public Health Partners Launch National Youth Mental Health Project

May 21, 2020

 [Well Beings Press Announcement](#)

WELL BEINGS Provides Teens Platform to Share Stories, Find Resources Amid COVID-19 Crisis with Digital-First Content

PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs' Journalists Report on Youth Mental Health Across the Country

Ken Burns to Executive Produce Documentary on Youth Mental Health

WASHINGTON, D.C. — May 21, 2020 — Sharon Percy Rockefeller, president and CEO of WETA Washington, D.C., today announced that the flagship public broadcasting station in the nation's capital is launching **WELL BEINGS**, a major public media campaign addressing the health needs of Americans. The campaign debuts with the **YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH PROJECT**, beginning with original digital content, social media campaigns, and information on mental health resources from project partners emphasizing mental health needs and voices of youth.

Americans are facing an increase in mental health concerns — from anxiety, depression, access to resources, post-traumatic stress disorder, addiction and suicide — as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the World Health Organization and The Mental Health Coalition. While the **WELL BEINGS YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH PROJECT** was conceived of and in development prior to the pandemic, organizers are launching a digital phase now, given the unprecedented impact COVID-19 is having on America's youth.

The project launch includes a new website, WellBeings.org, publication of **WELL BEINGS** social media channels, and social media campaigns featuring content from PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs and **BRAVE TEENS** video diaries, both with a focus on youth mental health during this critical time. **WELL BEINGS** will provide information, community resources, and new digital-first content that will share the personal accounts of young people around the country

living with and managing mental health challenges, especially during the pandemic and afterwards.

“Public media is uniquely situated to convene expert partners, reach wide audiences, and create cross-platform content on urgent public issues. The mental health crisis in this country is critically important, and we have the opportunity to create a national conversation on this topic as well as provide robust resources” noted Rockefeller. “Mental health issues are particularly acute for young people now, but they are also showing us new ways to intervene and provide care and assistance to those with the greatest needs. By listening to their peers, removing the stigma associated with these illnesses, and helping guide those in need to resources, young people are inspiring all who are seeking new approaches and changing how Americans think about mental health issues.”

Rockefeller also announced that Ken Burns, a WETA production partner for more than 30 years, will executive produce a new documentary — **HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT: OUR MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS** (w.t.) — that explores how young people are addressing their mental health needs and the impact of mental health stigma and stress on today’s youth. The four-hour film, produced and directed by Erik Ewers and Christopher Loren Ewers of Ewers Brother Productions, will look at the experiences of young people who live with mental health conditions and focus on the importance of awareness and compassion. This film will shine a clear light on what life is like for these young people as well as for the parents, teachers, friends and healthcare providers in their lives.

“As a society, we continue to test the resiliency of youth without truly understanding how the stresses of today, including this unprecedented pandemic, are impacting them,” said Ken Burns. “Erik and Christopher set out to listen and learn to America’s young people, documenting their experiences but also listening to how they are identifying new ways to address mental health challenges. It is a remarkable journey that we hope will capture the unique voices of these young people as they navigate an extraordinarily difficult moment in our country’s history.”

In addition to the major public television film, the **YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH PROJECT** will feature digital content from **BRAVE TEENS**, **PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs**, **American Public Media’s Call to Mind**, and **OUT OF THE DARK** (w.t.). It will also include a 24-city **WELL BEINGS TOUR** with in-person activities and timing to be determined based on public health conditions. To learn more, visit WellBeings.org or follow @WellBeingsOrg on [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/WellBeingsOrg), [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/WellBeingsOrg), or [Twitter](https://twitter.com/WellBeingsOrg), and join the conversation with #WellBeings.

BRAVE TEENS Video Diaries

The BRAVE TEENS video diary series is a first-of-its-kind digital community of teen storytellers who are going on the record about their mental health journeys. The daily diaries —shot candidly on cell phones — are personal, unfiltered accounts from young people (ages 14-19) who are living with or recovering from a mental health condition or substance abuse. Debuting on WellBeings.org and **WELL BEINGS** social media channels, BRAVE TEENS seeks to break down stigmas and help young people struggling with mental health challenges.

With their schools abruptly closed, graduations and proms cancelled, and college plans up in the air, teens are increasingly — and understandably — overwhelmed. The series is co-produced by WETA and Principle Pictures, and features storytellers from This Is My Brave, an organization that uses performing arts to fight the stigma around mental health challenges and addiction. A preview of BRAVE TEENS is available at <https://youtu.be/8qlqKdbLysQ>.

These themes will be further explored in BRAVE HIGH (w.t.) — WETA's first feature-length digital documentary, expected in 2021. This character-driven verité film, directed by Beth Murphy of Principle Pictures, will dive deep into the personal lives of talented teens who are preparing for This Is My Brave's high school stage production that welcomes teens from all walks of life to stand up on stage and bravely share their mental health stories without fear, shame or stigma.

"With both BRAVE TEENS and BRAVE HIGH (w.t.), we want to give young people who are facing mental health challenges a chance to hear directly from their peers, feel inspired and see that they are not alone," Murphy, founder of Principle Pictures, noted.

PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs

PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs is an award-winning program from PBS NewsHour that connects students with a network of public broadcasting mentors and an innovative journalism curriculum to develop digital media, critical thinking, and communication skills while producing original news reports. Student Reporting Labs will serve as a digital content partner for the YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH PROJECT, producing stories focused on youth mental health — all developed, produced and edited by high school students. The initial series, which launched in early 2020, focuses on challenging stereotypes and misconceptions around mental health. In addition, their student journalists will serve as panelists throughout the project's tour.

"Every year we ask our community of youth reporters: what issues are top of mind? And every year they talk about teen mental health from the perspective of journalists who know this issue is not understood or discussed enough," said Student Reporting Labs Executive Director Leah Clapman. "We're so proud to be a **WELL BEINGS** partner and deploy our network of student journalists to explore stories in their local communities and elevate youth voices in the national conversation through the power of storytelling and media making."

An overview video about PBS Newshour Student Reporting Labs is available to watch here: https://youtu.be/kxKII_cC0Oc

American Public Media's Call to Mind

Call to Mind is American Public Media and Minnesota Public Radio's initiative to foster new conversations about mental health. Call to Mind will partner with regional public media stations to create live events for the WELL BEINGS TOUR on youth mental health that will be recorded for broadcast. The events will be designed to create relevant and engaging conversations for regional audiences, covering topics such as mental health and new technology and the experiences of athletes, people of color and Indigenous peoples, and high school and college

students. The live events will be broadcast by regional public media stations, featuring moderated discussion with regional mental health experts, youth, and celebrities, and including audience experiences and questions.

“Today’s youth are facing mental and emotional challenges that are often far more stressful than those faced by their parents and grandparents,” said Babette Apland, Managing Director of Call to Mind. “As half of all life-long mental illnesses emerge by age 14 and three-fourths by age 24, youth are creating a generational shift in awareness that demands national attention.”

An overview video about American Public Media’s Call to Mind is available to watch here:

<https://youtu.be/C94iPswCOnI>

OUT OF THE DARK (w.t.) Digital Series

An integral part of WELL BEINGS’s digital content includes the multi-part digital series OUT OF THE DARK (w.t.), premiering online in the second half of 2020. The series is in development with the award-winning production company Redglass Pictures, led by Sarah Klein and Tom Mason. OUT OF THE DARK (w.t.) will push to destigmatize mental health conditions through the emotional, inspiring, and sometimes irreverent stories of people whose lives have been touched and changed by mental health challenges. The pieces will spark dialogue and empower a generation of young people to be vocal and open about their mental health journey. To reach this younger audience and fuel further engagement, WETA will integrate these stories into unique social media campaigns on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter and Snapchat.

WELL BEINGS TOUR

The campaign is slated to include a 24-city tour (2020–2022) where caregivers, teachers, counselors, and youth with lived-experiences will discuss mental health today and provide resources and information on best practices, including youth-focused engagement and support systems. The tour, which will be virtual and/or in-person depending on the market and public health conditions, may include **Mental Health First Aid Training** sessions for members of the community who support youth. Mental Health First Aid, which is operated by the **National Council on Behavioral Health**, is a skills-based training course that teaches participants how to identify, understand and respond to mental health conditions and substance use issues. The main public event in each tour stop will begin with a resource fair featuring volunteer opportunities and information from local community organizations. The resource fair will be followed by arts performances, a panel discussion and Q&A with local experts.

Funding Support

“Such an ambitious project would not be possible without the generosity of dedicated funders,” Rockefeller said. “We are particularly grateful to the Staglin family for their tireless commitment to brain and mental health and their leadership in empowering **WELL BEINGS** to bring content and resources to communities nationwide.

The **WELL BEINGS YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH PROJECT** is made possible by Otsuka, Kaiser Permanente, Bank of America, American Psychiatric Association Foundation, One Mind, Movember, National Alliance on Mental Illness, The Dauten Family Foundation, Dana Foundation, Hersh Foundation, Mental Health Services Oversight & Accountability Commission, Frances Von Schlegell and John E. Von Schlegell, Robina Riccitiello, Sutter Health, Jackson Family Enterprises, and Pritzker Traubert Foundation. The project underwriters are leveraging their organizational resources to support **WELL BEINGS** and have created a video at <https://youtu.be/6Ke4BTivJzU>.

Engagement & Content Partners

WETA has assembled a wide range of partners to collaborate on the project, both for digital content and the WELL BEINGS TOUR. In addition to local public media stations, the project will include American Public Media, PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs, PEOPLE, Forbes Media, Mental Health America, National Council for Behavioral Health, The Steve Fund, WE organization, and Active Minds, among others.

Project Advisors

WETA has formed a robust group of project advisors — including mental health professionals, researchers, patient advocates, educators and parents — to provide feedback on the **WELL BEINGS YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH PROJECT**. Advisors include Cheryl Aguilar with Hope Center for Wellness; Ira Burnim with Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law; Lauren Carson with Black Girls Smile; Jennifer (Roseman) Christman with MyAdvisor/VetAdvisor; Justin Constantine with Veteran Success Resource Group and The Constantine Group; Pamela End of Horn with Indian Health Service Headquarters at U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Dr. Bob Findling with Virginia Commonwealth University; Joshua A Gordon with National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH); Pamela Harrington with Bring Change to Mind; Dr. David B. Herzog with Harvard Medical School; David B. Hoppe with Gamma Law; Kay Redfield Jamison with The Johns Hopkins School of Medicine; Mary Pat King with Girl Scouts of West Central Florida; Peta-gay Ledbetter with The Alliance, A United Way Agency; Amanda Lenhart from the Data & Society Research Institute; Brian McNeill with National Latinx Psychology Association and Washington State University; Alison Malmon with Active Minds; Lau Morrison with The Code Green Campaign; Meaghan O'Brien with Mental Health Association of San Francisco; Michael Rich with Boston Children's Hospital; Kristina Saffran with Equip Health; Phil and Donna Satow with The Jed Foundation; Karen Severns with Aberdeen Indian Health Services (IHS); Jane Ellen Stevens with ACEs Connection; Amanda Southworth with Astra Labs; Kevin Wong with The Trevor Project; and Scott Zeller with UC-Riverside.

About WELL BEINGS

The **WELL BEINGS** campaign addresses the critical health needs of Americans through broadcast content, original digital content, and impactful local events. The multi-year campaign, created by WETA Washington, D.C., brings together partners from across the country, including

patients, families, caregivers, teachers, medical and mental health professionals, social service agencies, private foundations, filmmakers, corporations and media sponsors, to create awareness and resources for better health for all. To learn more, visit WellBeings.org or follow @WellBeingsOrg on Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter, and join the conversation with #WellBeings.

About WETA

WETA is the leading public broadcaster in the nation's capital, serving Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia with educational initiatives and with high-quality programming on television, radio and digital. WETA Washington, D.C., is the second largest producing-station of new content for public television in the United States, with news and public affairs programs including PBS NEWSHOUR and WASHINGTON WEEK; films by Ken Burns such as COUNTRY MUSIC, KEN BURNS PRESENTS THE GENE: AN INTIMATE HISTORY and THE ROOSEVELTS: AN INTIMATE HISTORY; series and documentaries by Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., including FINDING YOUR ROOTS WITH HENRY LOUIS GATES, JR. (Seasons 3-6) and RECONSTRUCTION: AMERICA AFTER THE CIVIL WAR; and performance specials including THE KENNEDY CENTER MARK TWAIN PRIZE and THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS GERSHWIN PRIZE FOR POPULAR SONG. More information on WETA and its programs and services is available at www.weta.org. Visit www.facebook.com/wetatvfm on Facebook or follow @WETAtvfm on Twitter.

Press Contacts

Kate Formichella, kate_formichella@dkcnews.com, 212-981-5193

Mary Stewart, mstewart@weta.org, 703-998-2830